

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Making It Work

Department of Education

A Student's Story

It's Not Who You Are; It's What You Have

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In offering advice to others with disabilities, Lisa Moody says, "Remember, your disability is not who you are; it's what you have." She reminds others that just because you have a disability, it does not mean that you can't live your life like everyone else.

Lisa obviously lives by this motto as she pursues her dreams and goals. Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist Lisa Mitchell says Lisa has an awesome, upbeat personality and always has a smile on her face. Despite the fact that she has to work so much harder to get through life on a day to day basis, she stays positive and focused.

Lisa was born with Spastic Diplegic Cerebral Palsy, causing difficulties with mobility and other fine motor skills. She cannot walk long distances, has poor balance, and writing is difficult for her. These challenges, however, have not stopped her from achieving her goals.

Lisa was a busy young woman at her small high school in Wakefield, Nebraska, participating in many extra-curricular activities including National Honor Society, band, choir, and speech. She says that,

"Learning to juggle school, work, and extracurricular activities was at times overwhelming, but as long as I was organized and managed my time appropriately, I was okay." She notes that her teachers were great mentors and helped guide her to where she is today.

And where is she today? She started college at the University of Nebraska – Omaha (UNO) in the fall of 2005. She lives in a dormitory with three other roommates and has served as a Resident Assistant for the past two

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Focus on Employment:

Employers Speak

Who knows better than employers what it takes to be successful on the job? Representatives from Nebraska employers have shared their suggestions for success to be passed along to you. Check out the advice this employer has for students as they begin interviewing for jobs.

1. Be presentable – dress per position.
2. Think before you speak and listen, listen, listen.
3. Ask questions if you are unsure about something.
4. Always be on time.
5. Be accountable for your actions.

This excellent advice was provided by:

*Gayle Sutherland
Human Resource Manager
Allmand Bros., Inc*

Allmand™



Lisa Moody

By Youth, For Youth!

An exciting new project is opening doors for Nebraska youth with disabilities. The Nebraska Youth Leadership Council (YLC) is the result of an initiative of the Nebraska Department of Education, co-sponsored by the Office of Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation.

What does the YLC do?

The YLC is a group of young people who come together on a regular basis to discuss issues that are important to Nebraska youth with disabilities. The group also provides leadership activities for members and serves as an advocacy group for all youth with disabilities. The activities and focus of the group are determined by the members, based on what matters to them.

Who are the members of the YLC?

Recruitment has been under way the past few months to establish the Youth Leadership Council. Twenty-five youth across the state applied for membership. A selection committee reviewed the applications and selected 16 official members of Nebraska's very first Youth Leadership Council. Membership requirements state that, in order to serve on the YLC, youth must:

- Be between the ages of 14 and 21;
- Have a disability;
- Have leadership skills OR want to learn these skills;
- Be able to represent youth with disabilities and speak out on their behalf; and
- Be able to attend 4-5 meetings per year.

The YLC promotes diversity by seeking male and female members of varying disability types, ages, race/ethnicity, and geographic locations. The new Council has members from Scottsbluff, Kimball,

Grant, Cozad, Merna, Norfolk, Verdigre, Arlington, Wisner, Rosalie, David City, Papillion, Millard, and Bellevue.

Disability groups represented on the Council include: Blind/Visually Impaired, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Learning Disability, Attention Deficit Disorder, Mental/Behavioral Health, Fragile X, and other health impairments.

YLC Facilitator, Kristi Berst, says, "With the strengths, experiences, and skill sets each Council member brings with them to the Nebraska YLC, I believe we have the best group of young people to begin this new project! They will be a huge asset to Vocational Rehabilitation, Special Education, the Nebraska Department of Education, and the state!"

What are the benefits of the YLC for its members?

Through their participation, Youth Leadership Council members gain:

- Leadership experience;
- Self-advocacy skills;
- Self-confidence; and
- Resume building experiences.

Most importantly, members are learning that their opinion matters!

What are the benefits of the YLC for other Nebraska youth?

The YLC provides representation and a "voice" for all youth with disabilities. They can be assured that their needs and interests are being taken into consideration when discussions are held that impact policies affecting them and services they receive.

What are the benefits of the YLC for the state?

An important function of the YLC is serving as an advisory board to the State Rehabilitation Council and the Special Education Advisory Council. This means that, when issues that impact youth with disabilities are being considered by those two groups, the YLC provides input based upon the perspectives of Nebraska youth with disabilities.

State decision makers benefit from obtaining the input of youth, allowing for policies and programs to be developed that are truly helpful to young persons with disabilities. This will lead to a more cohesive system of services for youth as they transition to adult life.

What else lies ahead?

There are plans to later develop Regional Youth Leadership Councils across the state. The State YLC will be the leaders in this process for their respective regions. More information regarding this will be provided as it becomes available.

Want to know more about the Nebraska's Youth Leadership Council?

Contact Kristi Berst, YLC Facilitator
Educational Service Unit #3
6949 S. 110th Street
Omaha NE 68128
Phone: 402.670.1437
E-mail: kristi.berst@nebraska.gov

The group also provides leadership activities for members and serves as an advocacy group for all youth with disabilities.

A Student's Story

It's Not Who You Are; It's What You Have ... continued

years. Her major is Speech-Language Pathology and, after completing her Master's degree, she plans to work in a hospital with children with language and speech impairments.

All of this is possible because of support from her parents, assistance from Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab), accommodations from the University, and equipment that assists her with mobility.

First and foremost in importance is the support from her parents. Lisa says that, "My parents have been my support system from day one, and have always helped me to achieve my goals. They have always supported me in whatever I wanted to do. They never once said that I couldn't do something because I was disabled. In fact, they pushed me to not

let my disability get in the way of what I wanted to do."

Then, there's the assistance Lisa received from Voc Rehab. Staff members Lisa Mitchell and Judy Wehrle began working with her during her sophomore year of high school to examine her work preferences, skills, and interests to help her determine career goals. They assisted her in working through the process of obtaining financial aid for college. They, along with Lisa and her mother, worked with the Disability Services Office (DSO) at the University. All colleges and universities have offices similar to the DSO whose responsibility is to collaborate with students, faculty, and staff to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to all university programs and activities. In Lisa's case, accommodations are

provided to give her extended time for taking exams, allow for early registration, provide assistance with note taking, and arrange for campus transportation to pick up and drop her off at a convenient location.

These accommodations don't even begin to compare to the freedom and independence that a transportation device gives Lisa. As she was beginning to make plans to attend college, it was apparent that it would be impossible for her to get around a campus the size of UNO without assistance. Conversations began with her physician to determine how to address the fact that she can only walk short distances, stumbles a lot due to poor balance, and has leg and back pain.

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Connections: A Look at Resources

National Youth Leadership Network

You've read about youth leadership activities in Nebraska. What about similar activities around the country?

The National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN) is a non-profit organization run by young people with disabilities. This organization is made up of young leaders with disabilities from across the U.S. and its territories.

NYLN offers a variety of services, including:

- Providing webcasts that offer training for youth, at no charge;
- Serving as resource consultants who participate on boards and committees all over the country;

- Providing speakers for public presentations; and
- Publishing four newsletters annually, with articles written by young people. Included are stories about current events, personal profiles of young leaders, and opportunities around the country.

NYLN also offers a National Clearinghouse that includes resources for:

- Education
- Employment
- Healthcare
- Disability history/disability culture
- Advocacy
- Policy
- Youth-made materials

Log on to www.nyln.org to find more information.

- Click on the link that says *Become a Member* to join the organization, at no cost! Members get updates and resources right away.
- Click on the *Clearinghouse* link to see the many resources available. NYLN's mission is to promote youth leadership and education. Take advantage of all they have to offer!

A Student's Story ... continued

Lisa's doctor carefully evaluated her needs and determined that it is important that she has the ability to stand and bear weight on her legs to help maintain healthy bone density and overall conditioning. He felt that a scooter or motorized wheelchair would cause her to lose strength and, additionally, would create problems because it is not easily transportable.

The solution was to purchase a two wheeled, small electric personal transportation device known as the Segway. When insurance and Medicaid denied coverage for the purchase of this device, Voc Rehab stepped in to assist with the purchase. Lisa says that the Segway is the greatest piece of equipment ever invented! She says that, "Because of my Segway, I am no longer embarrassed to go to the mall or go to a theme park because I feel like a 'normal' person, instead of the girl in the wheelchair."

Lisa offers this advice for students with disabilities. "I know that, at times, having a disability can really get you down. I know; I have been there. But I also know that if you spend your time worrying about what you don't have or can't do, then you will never accomplish your goals. When you are feeling down and

out, remember that sitting around thinking about how hard you have it won't make the disability go away. Stand up for yourself and show the world that you can make a difference and that you can succeed at anything you put your mind to." It is quite obvious that Lisa is following her own advice!

For More Information:

Contact the
State Vocational
Rehabilitation Office
in Lincoln at
1-402-471-3644
or toll free at
1-877-637-3422.

You may obtain
information on the
Voc Rehab Service
Office in your area by
calling these numbers
or accessing the
Service Office listing
on the web at:
<http://www.vocrehab.state.ne.us/vr/office.html>

About this Publication

This publication, produced by Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, is intended for students with disabilities and their families. The next issue, Volume #31, is scheduled for distribution in the fall of 2009.

Please contact us if you:

- Would like additional copies of this publication.
- Have questions or would like more details about any of the information contained in this issue.
- Have a success story you'd like to share with us.
- Have suggestions for topics for future issues.
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Additional Resources

If you have questions or concerns about services from Vocational Rehabilitation or are looking for additional disability resources, contact the Hotline for Disability Services/Client Assistance Program at 1-800-742-7594 or in Lincoln at 402-471-0801 or e-mail Victoria at: victoria.rasmussen@nebraska.gov.

